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C O N F I D E N T I A L RIYADH 002096

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/10/2017

TAGS: [KPAO](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [SA](#)

SUBJECT: FUROR OVER THE CASE OF SAUDI NATIONAL HOMAIDAN
AL-TURKI DIES DOWN, BUT IS PROBABLY NOT DEAD

REF: A. 2006 RIYADH 7097
[1B.](#) 2006 RIYADH 9031

Classified By: Acting Deputy Chief of Mission David Rundell for reasons
1.4 (b) and (d).

[¶](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: Al-Arabiya aired a two-part investigative program in early September regarding Saudi national Homaidan al-Turki, who was sentenced by a Colorado court in August 2006 to 28 years to life for sexually assaulting his Indonesian maid (ref A). The program featured interviews with officials involved in the case, supporters and family of al-Turki, SAG officials, and al-Turki himself, appearing to allot equal time to both sides. Media reaction to the Al-Arabiya program was minimal compared to the extensive coverage -- and broad public support -- following al-Turki's 2006 conviction. END SUMMARY.

[¶](#)2. (U) Al-Arabiya aired on September 3 the first part of a two-part investigative reporting program focusing on Saudi national Homaidan al-Turki, who was sentenced by a Colorado court in August 2006 to 28 years to life for sexually assaulting his Indonesian maid (ref A). The first part of the program featured a series of interviews with individuals involved in the case, both American and Saudi. The second part aired on September 13 and featured an interview with al-Turki.

BACKGROUND

[¶](#)3. (U) In addition to al-Turki's conviction, his wife, Sarah Khonaizan, was convicted of federal immigration charges and theft, for which she was sentenced to home confinement, 48 hours of community service, five years probation, and two months in jail. Saudis in both the U. S. and the Kingdom reacted vocally and negatively to the outcome of al-Turki's case, some calling for a boycott of U.S. products, the return of Saudi students studying in the U.S., and the cessation of future scholarships to U.S. educational institutions. Very few Saudis believed that al-Turki sexually assaulted his maid, and many thought that the FBI pursued him on these charges because it had been unsuccessful in charging him with terrorism

ONE YEAR LATER

[¶](#)4. (U) Al-Arabiya's "Third Eye" program aired, beginning September 3, 2007, a two-part investigative program regarding al-Turki's case. This program takes the public,

step-by-step, through a case by interviewing various individuals involved in that case. The first part of the program on al-Turki included interviews with Colorado,s Attorney General (AG), the Chief Prosecutor, the Vice President of Saudi Arabia,s Human Rights Commission (HRC), al-Turki,s lawyer, a Saudi Shoura Council member, family friends (American and Saudi), and al-Turki,s son and two daughters. The air time allotted to the U.S. officials appeared equal to that allotted al-Turki,s supporters.

¶ 15. (C) The host interviewed Colorado AG John Suthers, who reiterated the points he made to Saudi officials and al-Turki's family during his November 2006 visit to the Kingdom (ref B). Suthers conveyed his belief that disagreement about the case is due to culture differences. He deflected criticism by stating, "We cannot deny the maid of her right to complain against sexual assault just because she does not have four eyewitnesses like in Sharia law." The Chief Prosecutor revealed that she believed the maid and noted that two Muslim American women said they were also subjected to al-Turki,s sexual harassment. The Vice President of the HRC commented on the need for a neutral look into the trial, alleging that an FBI agent told him that al-Turki would be put in jail -- with or without cause. (NOTE: PolOff met with members of HRC on September 11, and the Vice President commented that he believes the FBI was trying to recruit al-Turki as an agent. END NOTE.)

¶ 16. (U) The second part of the program focused on an interview with al-Turki, who still maintains his innocence. He also claims that he treated the maid as if she were a "member of the family." He added that he kept her home to protect her -- as with all female members of his family. Furthermore, he said the maid went out with him and his family whenever she wanted. Al-Turki explained the unpaid wages by stating that

he transferred money to his maid,s family in Indonesia and delayed payment at her request. This second segment was originally scheduled for prime time broadcast, but was moved to a morning slot to accommodate a live news story. It is unclear whether Al-Arabiya will rebroadcast the program during a future prime time slot.

¶ 17. (C) Media reaction to the Al-Arabiya program was minimal compared to the extensive coverage -- and broad public support -- following al-Turki's 2006 conviction. However, immediately after the first part aired, a member of the Shoura Council expressed his anger towards America and the American judicial system in a meeting with EmbOffs on September 4. Additionally, HRC President Turki al-Sudairy expressed his disbelief to PolOff on September 11 that al-Turki had received a fair trial, saying he did not think that life in prison was a reasonable sentence. However, he appeared satisfied with PolOff,s explanation regarding the different statutes and mandatory sentences from state to state. Finally, conservative writer Omaymah Al-Jalahma described the injustices of al-Turki's trial in a September 16 Al-Watan news article, condemning the maid,s failure to talk to the Indonesian Consulate and questioning the fact that the maid changed her testimony after 12 interviews.

¶ 18. (C) COMMENT: Last year, the al-Turki case was a cause celebre for many Saudis from all sides of the political spectrum claiming USG persecution of Muslims. While the aim of this two-part documentary could well have been to re-ignite that furor, it did not spark media attention or even much public discussion. This could possibly be due to lighter Ramadan programming and/or the poor timing of the Al-Turki interview broadcast, which dampened enthusiasm for this topic. However, we also believe that AG Suthers' visit to the Kingdom, during which he met with King Abdullah, helped dampen Saudi fears that al-Turki had been mistreated because he was a Muslim or a Saudi. END COMMENT.

FRAKER